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(IJPPA) **Accountable Pan-African Governance Mirroring Nkrumah:
Comparative Institutional Analysis of Continental Unity, Public
Sector Performance, and Pathways for Reforms**



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Accountable Pan-African Governance Mirroring Nkrumah: Comparative Institutional Analysis of Continental Unity, Public Sector Performance, and Pathways for Reforms

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This article conducted an institutional examination of Pan-African governance and public sector performance by remodeling Kwame Nkrumah’s fundamental principles in *Africa Must Unite*.

Methodology: The study employed comparative institutional analysis and documentary triangulation as a robust qualitative research method to appreciate the way rules, norms, and organizational structures vary between contexts and to validate findings via diverse, autonomous documentary sources. This approach was adopted in order to reinforce the validity, reliability and rigor of findings, transcending sole-source bias to appreciating the intricate dynamics of continental integration.

Findings: The study found that the logic of “reserved powers” as postulated by Nkrumah is moderately incorporated into contemporary architecture of governance in Africa via the organs of the African Union (AU), acknowledged Regional Economic Communities (RECs), and AfCFTA initiatives. However, these arrangements are largely inhibited by contestation of authority, coordinate regionalism, —but remains constrained by legitimacy contestation, overlapping regionalism, variable domestication of continental norms, and uneven administrative capacity. It also established that modern accountability instruments exist but are not yet sufficiently integrated into a continent-wide performance regime that can credibly sustain deeper sovereignty pooling.

Unique Contributions to Theory, Policy, and Practice: The study made significant contribution with a sequenced propositional reform — “*accountable pooling of sovereignty*”, a concept which links concrete milestones of integration to quantifiable integrity within the public sector space, thereby enhancing efficiency and delivering metrics, but at the same time, foregrounding digital governance as a contemporary integration “spine”.

Keywords: Pan African Governance, African Union Reforms, Standards of Accountability in Public Sector, AfCFTA Digital Governance, Agenda 2063

1.0 INTRODUCTION TO THE KEY CONCEPT

This study tackles a persistent query, featuring in African studies and public policy: *What would a conscientious, systemic Pan-African programme of governance resemble, if it were driven by Nkrumah's unity concept, yet disciplined by the peremptory demands of contemporary framework of accountability, performance, and legitimacy?* (Nkrumah, 1963).

1.1 Mirroring Nkrumah (Africa Must Unite)

Nkrumah's main thesis focused on institutional and strategic imperatives. He believed that political fragmentation and polarization made room for structural weaknesses and institutional fragilities that exposed the Pan African Project to external leverages and manipulations, leading to what he termed as "pick-off" dynamics. He further argued that the quest for continental unity and integration shouldn't be confined to mere abstract aspirations; rather it must be built on core principles and fundamental directives adequate enough to ensuring sustainable security, development planning, and in the process, procure for Africa, world bargaining power and diplomatic leverages. The hub or central control in this philosophical thinking is *reserved powers* that will enable member states to retain their national identities, constitutional frameworks and governance systems, but at the same time, make conscientious effort to pool authority in restricted critical sectors such as defense, foreign policy, and integrated economic planning (Nkrumah, 1963).

1.2 Contemporary Analysis/Critique:

Undoubtedly, Africa in the contemporary arena commands a complex web of institutions with greater degree of integration orientation. For example, the African Union has its own Charter with a clearly defined structure of organs and formal declarations (commitments) to pursue a unified endeavour – collective action (African Union, 2024). Besides this arrangement, the AU has also officially identified with eight Regional Economic Communities (RECs) designed as the main ingredients and tools for the Pan African integration project (African Union, 2000; 2001). It must be noted that the legal framework of the AfCFTA came into force in 2019, paving way for commencement of trade in January 2021, resulting in the adoption of a new Protocol on Digital Trade in February 2024—which ultimately signaled the "integration by instruments", which is now the trunk route to Pan-African governance (African Union, 2019; 2021). In spite of this, institutional reforms documentation point to the fact that these continental organs are bedeviled with persistent performance deficiencies and accountability gaps. Equally concerning and deep troubling is the fact that since 2022, trend analyses in governance point to a decline in many dimensions of governance across the continent —conditions that tend to screw up any attempts to sprint towards total autonomy and absolute authority (Kagame, 2024).

Therefore, this study raises three fundamental research questions:

1. How could the institutional intentions of Nkrumah be operationalized as *key functions* instead of been seen more as antique organizational designs?
2. Which modern Pan African and sub-regional institutions run in proximity to those functions, and where do capability and institutional weaknesses remain critical?
3. What ordered policy tools and time frameworks could reasonably reinforce Pan-African governance, whilst making conscious effort to safeguard legitimacy through quantifiable responsibility, objective answerability, and enhanced service-delivery performance? (Nkrumah, 1963).

The study therefore proposes that profound Pan-African governance would find most reasonable meaning, if considered as *capability-first integration* – a concept denoting the pooling of progressive sovereignty connected to practical and empirically verifiable progress in public sector accountability, efficiency, and effectiveness, while being ably supported by public financial management reforms, domestication of Pan African governance norms and values, creating formidable foundations for a highly efficient digital governance propelled by the need for transaction costs reductions, and broaden citizen-legible benefits (Kagame, 2024).

2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

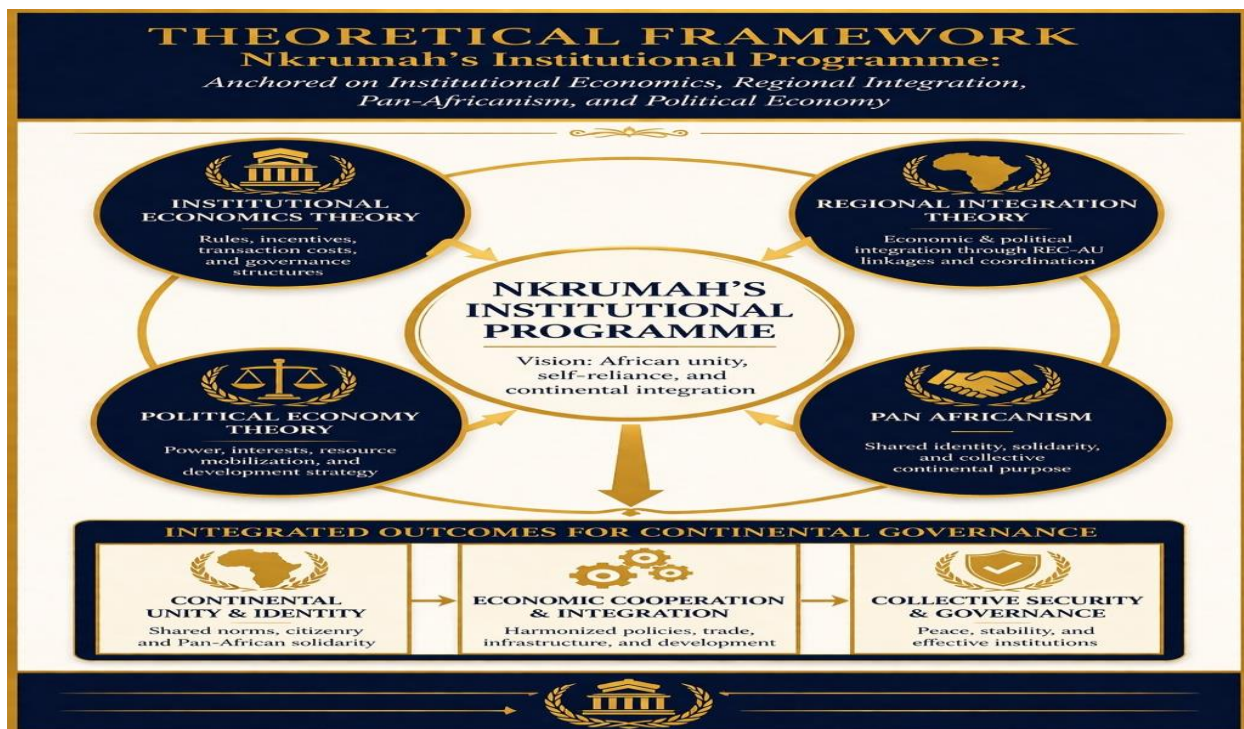


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

(Source: Authors Construct)

2.1 Table 1: Key Theories

1 INSTITUTIONAL ECONOMICS THEORY 			2 REGIONAL INTEGRATION THEORY 			3 POLITICAL ECONOMY THEORY 		
	Theory / Approach	Main Proponents		Theory / Approach	Main Proponents		Theory / Approach	Main Proponents
1	Original Institutional Economics (Veblen, 1898)	Veblen, 1898	1	Classical Federalism	Spinelli (1941); Friedrich (1968)	1	Classical Political Economy	(Smith, 1776; Ricardo, 1817)
2	Legal-Transactional Institutionalism (Commons, 1931)	Commons, 1931	2	Functionalism	Mitrany (1943)	2	Marxist / Critical Political Economy	(Marx, 1867)
3	Transaction-Cost Economics (Coase, 1937)	Coase, 1937	3	Neofunctionalism	Haas (1958); Lindberg (1963)	3	Keynesian Political Economy	(Keynes, 1936)
4	Institutional Change and Path Dependence (North, 1990)	North, 1990	4	Intergovernmentalism	Hoffmann (1966); Moravcsik (1998)	4	Structuralist Political Economy	(Prebisch, 1950)
5	New Institutional Economics / Governance Structures (Williams, 2000)	Williams, 2000	5	Liberal Intergovernmentalism	Moravcsik (1998)	5	Dependency Political Economy	(Frank, 1967)
6	Collective-Action Institutionalism (Ostrom, 1990)	Ostrom, 1990	6	New Regionalism	Hettne (2000); Söderbaum (2016)	6	Developmental-State Political Economy	(Johnson, 1982)
			7	Developmental Regionalism	Mkandawire (2001); Rodrik (2004)	7	Public Choice / Constitutional Political Economy	(Buchanan & Tullock, 1962)
			8	Pan-African Regionalism	Kwame Nkrumah (1963); Du Bois (1947)			

4 PAN-AFRICAN THOUGHT & POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES 			5 ECONOMIC PAN-AFRICANISM (CONTEMPORARY AGENDA) 		
	Theory / Approach	Main Proponents		Theory / Approach	Main Proponents
	Early Pan-Africanism (Diasporic intellectual tradition)	Henry Sylvester Williams (1900); W. E. B. Du Bois (1903, 1947)		AfCFTA-driven Economic Pan-Africanism	African Union (2018)
	Garveyism / Black Nationalist Pan-Africanism	Marcus Garvey (1920)		Institutional Economic Integration for Continental Development (Operational Agenda)	African Union (2018) (supported by UNECA, AfDB, AUC, AfCFTA Secretariat)
	Pan-African Congress Tradition	W. E. B. Du Bois (1919); George Padmore (1945)			
	Nkrumahism (Revolutionary Pan-Africanism)	Kwame Nkrumah (1963)			
	Cultural Pan-Africanism / Negritude	Léopold Sédar Senghor (1948); Aimé Césaire (1950)			
	Continental Institutional Pan-Africanism (OAU/AU phase)	Haile Selassie I (1963); Kwame Nkrumah (1963)			
	Neo-Pan-Africanism / African Renaissance	Thabo Mbeki (1998)			

	OVERARCHING GOAL: Unity, Peace, Prosperity, and Sustainable Development through Institutional, Political, and Economic Integration of Africa.
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3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Existential literature and policy archives pertaining to the subject matter under examination (2021-2026) can be classified into five strands, collectively shaping the plausibility of Nkrumah-centric governance model in today's African governance architecture:

- (i) Pan-Africanism and the emergent role of the AU
- (ii) Institutional reform, contestation of legitimacy, and organizational performance
- (iii) AfCFTA driven integration and the capacity for dispute settlement
- (iv) Norms of public service, public sector financing, and accountability infrastructure
- (v) Digital governance, disposition, and accountability (Oluruntoba, 2023).

3.1 Pan-Africanism and the Emergent Role of AU

Primarily, current scholarship examines Pan-Africanism as concurrently normative and strategic in which case the AU is situated as playing a dual role – providing the vehicle to drive unified voice and political expression, and also serving as a platform for inner conflict. To this end, Oluruntoba (2023) observes that Pan-Africanism and a reformed AU holds the potential to assist in repositioning Africa in a fluid global order, while pointing out that institutional reform is critical in the quest to gain credibility and capacity. Analytically, it is important to note that this observation aligns with the insistence by Nkrumah that the position of Africa in the global order is largely shaped by her own internal unity, whilst directing attention towards reforms of organizational politics and implementation, instead of just the constitutional limitations (Oluruntoba, 2023)

3.2 Institutional Reform, Contestation of Legitimacy, and Organizational Performance

An important modern approach places emphasis on legitimacy and contestation within international organisations. For instance, Gelot and Söderbaum (2024) designed a matrix for “legitimation struggles” in which they applied same to the AU (2015–2020), and argued that the contestation of legitimacy is not pursued only through performance metrics; instead, it can also be pursued through discourse centered on extensive social purpose of the organization, and that discursive legitimation is strengthened when implemented together with behavioural and institutional strategies (Gelot & Soderbaum, 2024). Again, it must be noted that this study establishes a major overpass to Nkrumah, when he contends that the project of a union cannot come to light by mere reliance on ideological mobilisation alone. Instead, it needs sustainable institutional strategies effectively put in place to stabilise legitimacy across several sectors (Gelot & Soderbaum, 2024).

3.3 AfCFTA Driven Integration and the Capacity for Dispute Settlement

Thirdly, research focused on AfCFTA has expanded several folds in the course of time, spanning the creation of AfCFTA. For example, Debrah et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review, where they observed that scholarship surrounding AfCFTA has been diversified and persistently highlighted the effect of growth, challenges of implementation, and key recommendations pertaining to policy. At the legal-institutional level, Kouamo (2024) examined how AfCFTA could establish and strengthen an effective mechanism for trade litigation, where they emphasized how useful lessons could be drawn from WTO dispute settlement experience to provide a learning loop and tapping into the digitalization imperative to reduce cost barriers and also solve the issues associated with deficits of participation. From the foregoing, it could be suggested that integration is increasingly governed through rules-based institutional devices. This process could also imply modern-day equivalent to Nkrumah's planning-and-coordination "commandments", though with a more codified and hierarchical structure far more than expected (Kouamo, 2024).

3.4 Norms of Public Service, Public Sector Financing, and Accountability Infrastructure

Public sector accountability and financing reforms are examined from the perspective of providing the foundational and supportive framework for the success of Pan African governance. In this direction, Adams and Lenaghan (2022) critically examined the internal financing arrangement of the AU (0.2% levy on eligible imports) compared to the rules of WTO, which brings to the fore, the challenge of predictable, self-financing as a necessary condition in the quest to ensure organisational effectiveness. Similarly, Mudau (2021, 2022) contends that the African Charter on Values and Principles of Public Service and Administration has the potential to contribute meaningfully to good governance, save that it is constrained by conditional approval, partial endorsement, and lack of effective implementation. These works therefore suggest that for any meaningful Pan African governance project to take place, professionalism in the civil service, financial independence and fiscal decentralization, enforceable and binding code of conducts should be treated as the core enforceable ingredients of integration rather individual country reconsiderations (Adams & Lenaghan, 2022).

3.5 Digital Governance, Disposition, and Accountability

Digital governance literature between 2024 and 2026 spot both opportunity and threat (risk). For instance, Plantinga (2024) integrates findings on digital governance in Africa and therefore contends that digitalisation could potentially shift judgement and the power to decide away from functional administrators and workers to IT savvies, which then raises fundamental governance questions about accountability and the use of AI. In their empirical work, Oduro and Agbevide (2026) analysed Ghana's e-governance portals and found that portals had the potential to minimize information asymmetries, although such a development does not automatically complete the cycle of accountability devoid of enforceability, developing effective mechanisms for citizen feedback, and the basic digital public infrastructure, including digital ID, payments, and data exchange. In analysing AfCFTA interconnected digital ecosystem, Kouty (2024) revealed that regulatory

barriers are not significantly associated with digital trade and therefore advocated for blended, stable regulatory environments that harmonize with regional digital governance.

3.6 Literature Gap and Positioning

There is persistence of a gap across these domains. In this instance, integration (the domain of AfCTA, RECS; reforms within the AU) and governance in the public sector (the domain of standards within civil service; financing; audits; digital accountability) are treated as adjacent and equidistant tracks by both theory and policy. Consequently, this study attempts to harmonize them by examining Nkrumah's unity project as more of a governance-capacity deficit and functional breakdown. Therefore, it proposes a structured system which matches integration milestones with empirical results and performance indicators (Nkrumah, 1963).

4.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

4.1 Primary Data Collection Technique

This study adopted comparative institutional analysis well established in documentary research. In this case, there wasn't a single country case. Instead, it comprised a set of institutional frameworks or role of governance proposed or implied by Nkrumah, as opposed to modern-day Pan Africa, regional, and national frameworks (Nkrumah, 1963).

4.2 Sources and Sampling (Documentary Triangulation)

Nkrumah's *Africa Must Unite* (1963) constituted the primary text. Similarly, formal continental/legal sources were used for immediate institutional relevance, including AU Constitutive Act; AU recognised RECs listings; AU reform report and decisions (Kagame, February 2024); Agenda 2063 Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan (2024–2033); AU financing/0.2% levy documentation; AU audit tracking system documentation; AfCFTA Agreement and operational timeline statements; the AfCFTA Protocol on Digital Trade; the AU Data Policy Framework; Peace Fund governance documentation; and status lists for selected governance instruments (African Union, 2001; 2001). Peer-reviewed research and reputable policy analysis (2021–2026 focus) and other relevant and applicable literature (Gelot & Soderbaum, 2024).

4.3 Analytical Procedure



Figure 2: Four Steps Analytical Procedure

(Source: Authors Construct)

From Figure 2, step one reconstructs the proposal put forth by Nkrumah as a set of an institutional framework or function (comprising continental political steering; common foreign policy; integrated defence; continental planning; market integration; administrative discipline) (Nkrumah, 1963). Step two outlines these functions onto contemporary alternatives [(such as AU organs; RECs; AfCFTA institutions; financing mechanisms; audit systems; governance charters; digital governance frameworks) (African Union, 2000; 2001)]. Step three examines conditions for capability and accountability, employing: (a) policy and reform documentation (stated weaknesses, reform commitments, institutional mandates), and (b) governance diagnostics [(continental governance trends; corruption indices; global governance indicators; digital government benchmarking) Kagame, 2024)]. Step four blends persuasive pathways for implementation and corresponding timelines by integrating measures for strengthening institutions with existing continental strategic foresights, especially Agenda 2063's 2024–2033 plan and AfCFTA's implementation trajectory (African Union, 2024).

4.4 Limitations (Unspecified Detail)

This study relied on qualitative content analysis or at best a triangulation (documentary and comparative analysis). Implicitly, it excluded first-hand accounts or interviews, ethnography, or within-case analysis. In view of this, the underlying criteria for country selection have not been specified. Therefore, findings could be most accurately described as organized and evidence-based synthesis intended to promote and reinforce extended empirical validation (Nkrumah, 1963).

5.0 FINDINGS

5.1 Nkrumah's Institutional Programme is Best Described as a Functional Architecture

5.1.1 Mirroring Nkrumah

Interpreted as a purpose-driven design, Nkrumah's governance programme lays exceeding emphasis on the following key imperatives:

- Continental political authority equipped with the capacity and capability for decisive action
- Common foreign policy and cohesive architecture of diplomacy
- Integrated defence planning and command designed with inbuilt mechanism to mitigate strategic vulnerability
- Continental economic planning to transform resources into economic development
- Removing internal barriers (physical and fiscal) with the view to building an integrated market with the potential to scale up industrialization

5.1.2 Contemporary Analysis/Critique:

The model of today's continental governance nearly reflects components of these functions, save that its design and configuration is more complex than Nkrumah had envisioned, i.e. the organs of

the AU make room for a Pan African steering and moral imperatives, thereby incorporating the recognition of eight RECs functioning as sub-regional integration blocs; whilst AfCFTA provides a framework treaty to facilitate market integration which had programmed to start in January 2021 with the adoption of new digital rules of trade in 2024 (African Union, 2000, 2001; African Union, 2019, 2024). This implies that the vision of Nkrumah's "Union government" now contends with, and should therefore be harmonized into an intricate, multifaceted regime rather than one of governance gap and structural deficiency (Gelot & Soderbaum, 2024).

5.2 Contemporary AU Reform Documentation Explicitly Identifies Performance/Accountability as a Binding Constraint

5.2.1 Mirroring Nkrumah

Nkrumah envisioned a continent-wide executive, equipped with functional capacity and capability of effectively planning, coordinating defence arrangements, and pursuing coordinated diplomacy with the strictest sense of administrative discipline, fiscal integrity, and the capacity to deliver—strategic focused than managerial inclined (Nkrumah, 1963).

5.2.2 Contemporary Analysis/Critique:

The AU reform decisions and attendant reporting in February 2024 revealed persistent organisational challenges, including poor accountability in relation to performance and delivery, ineffective management, and recurrent constraints associated with administrative, budgetary, and financial management (Kagame, 2024). Arguably, these challenges are not just minor bureaucratic bottlenecks. They constitute grave structural pre-requisites for deeper pooled sovereignty, where legitimacy and compliance by member states with shared authority are partially results-based. This finding therefore aligns well with extant literature on AU's battles for legitimacy, which emphasizes that legitimacy is challenged beyond rhetoric by testing organisational purpose strengthened by institutional strategies (Gelot & Soderbaum, 2024).

5.3 Accountability Instruments Exist but are Insufficiently Integrated into a Continent-wide Performance Regime

5.3.1 Mirroring Nkrumah

Nkrumah envisioned a political economy with a disciplined state of development scaled to continental standards – effectively mobilizing public resources channeled to economic transformation, and eliminating all forms of disintegration that wastes public resources (i.e. parallel militaries and redundant diplomacy) through the establishment of common institutions (Nkrumah, 1963).

5.3.2 Contemporary Analysis/Critique

Undoubtedly, series of accountability structures are embedded in modernized continental governance models. However, these structures remain institutionally fragmented. The Audit

Recommendations Tracking System (ARTS) of the AU is purpose-built in an attempt to explicitly design for expedited implementation of audit recommendations and therefore reinforce managerial oversight and reporting, clearly indicating a fundamental organisational shift towards systematic implementation (African Union, 2020). Equally, financing reforms that include the 0.2% levy mechanism are well placed as a delivery path to stable funding, decreased dependency and vulnerability, and therefore enhance greater autonomy, whilst admitting huge arrears/collection gaps impeding delivery (African Union, n.d). Similarly, the governance composition of the Peace Fund - a Board of Trustees, Financial Oversight, and an Independent Evaluation Panel yet again amply demonstrates another fundamental shift in the quest to promoting institutionalised oversight in the sector concerning peace and security (African Union, n.d). In spite of all these nuanced developments, it is important to note that governance trend assessment reveal a rather stalled progress in continental governance since 2022 and further indicate substantial deterioration for security and participation measures by the population, ultimately indicating that responsibility framework and stewardship mechanisms are yet to translate into significant governance outcomes gains (Mo Ibrahim, 2024).

5.4 Digital Governance Constitutes a Contemporary Integration “spine” but Introduces New Accountability Risks

5.4.1 Mirroring Nkrumah:

Admittedly, Nkrumah’s writings and postulations on the subject under consideration predated the digital age. Nevertheless, his pressing for strategic planning and integrated development point to a rather critical concern for information, capacity coordination and harmonization, and disintegrating internal barriers (physical and fiscal)—key functions only highly moderated by digital framework and data governance (Nkrumah, 1963) in contemporary context.

5.4.2 Contemporary Analysis/Critique:

In February 2022, the Executive Council of the Data Policy Framework of the AU endorsed that the Data Policy Framework expressly pursues integration of data governance frameworks in the quest to establishing collective standards, and credible and reliable digital environment (African Union Commission, 2022). Similarly, The AfCFTA Protocol on Digital Trade (adopted in February 2024) makes room for a Framework Agreement for harmonization of rules and standards that create an enable environment to facilitate digital trade (African Union, 2024). To this end, it is important to state that both empirical and conceptual scholarship lay emphasis that digitalization in itself does not guarantee or self-enforce accountability. In line with this, Plantinga (2024) contends that digital governance promotes the re-assignment autonomy upward to actors at the system level as a way of reshaping accountability, while Oduro and Agbevade (2026) observe that while portals have the potential to minimize information gap, they are unable to enforce accountability without the moderation of institutional reforms, means of citizen feedback, and digital public infrastructure (Plantinga, 2024). In the AfCFTA context, Kouty (2024) argues that

regulatory frameworks play significant role in enhancing intra-African digital trade and pinpoints regulatory bottlenecks as constraining factors, eventually reinforcing the policy case for integration, while emphasizing harmonisation, but also underscoring the political economy of institutions.

5.5 Table 2: Mapping Nkrumah's Proposed Institutions/Functions to Modern Equivalents

Nkrumahian Function	Institutional Intention	Contemporary Equivalent	Key Convergence & Gap
Continental Political Steering	Central authority for development & security	AU Assembly & Constitutive Act	Convergence: Institutional steering exists Gap: Sovereignty pooling contested (Nkrumah, 1963).
Unified External Posture	Common foreign policy "One Voice"	AU Common Positions & Diplomacy	Convergence: Aspiration to collective voice Gap: State autonomy dominates (Nkrumah, 1963).
Integrated Defence Planning	Continental defence coordination	AU Peace & Security Arrangements	Convergence: Peace's key instruments exist Gap: Unified command limited (Nkrumah, 1963).
Coordinated Continental Planning	Structural transformation planning	Agenda 2063 Framework & Instruments	Convergence: Peace's key instruments exist Gap: Delivery challenges persist (African Union, 2024).
Regional Building Blocks	Sub-regional acceleration to union	Eight AU-Recognised RECs	Convergence: Charters on public Service exist Gap: Still governance challenges (Mudau, 2022).
Professional Administration	Common ethics & discipline	Afrih Charter on Public Service	Convergence: Charters on public service exist. Gap: Governance challenges remain (Mudau, 2022).



It is important to note that Table 5 looks at "institutions" as same for all intent and purposes, instead of literal reproduction and duplicate, thereby aligning with the comparative method adopted (Nkrumah, 1963).

6.0 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

6.1.1 Obstacles and Counterarguments

6.1.1.1 Mirroring Nkrumah:

The fear of surrendered sovereignty was the basic counterargument Nkrumah anticipated. To this, he dismissed as strategically self-defeating and counterproductive, given the fact that fragmented sovereignty amounts to a diluted sovereignty. In his estimated opinion, duplicative defence and diplomacy doesn't make any fiscal rational sense for newly emerged independent states, thus advocating that unity should be seen a pragmatic tool to effectively explore in the quest to enhancing collective self-defense and systematic accelerated development (Nkrumah, 1963).

6.1.1.2 Contemporary Analysis/Critique:

Contemporary counterarguments are grouped into the following strands: legitimacy, capability, coordination, and digital governance risk.

6.1.2 Legitimacy

At the outset, it must be noted that legitimacy is not an issue of subsidiary consideration in statecraft and continental governance. As a matter of fact, it is a principal consideration, *primus interparis*. Going by Gelot and Söderbaum's legitimization-struggles analysis, it is implied that the purpose of the AU is clearly contested and that to promote stability of legitimacy, organizational strategies (behavioural and institutional) are crucial (Gelot & Soberdaum, 2024). There is rife perception that the Pan African Union project insulates elites from electoral or administrative accountability and this development is fuelling contestation as opposed to consolidating unity and integration. This development has been reinforced as governance diagnostics demonstrate a holdback of total governance progress since 2022 and a further deterioration in some aspects that impact huge segments of the populations—situations that amplify doubts and cynicisms related to the centralization of projects not seen to be connected to direct benefits of the citizenry (Mo Ibrahim, 2024)

6.1.3 Capability

Challenges of capability are openly admitted in official reform documentation. For example, the 2024 Reform Report and decisions draw attention lack of political will and commitment to implement and identify accountability and administrative weaknesses that negatively affect performance outcomes (Kagame, 2024). This therefore indicates that the most effective and resilient modern day rendition of Nkrumah is not "centralise now"; instead, it is "centralise only as capability and accountability increase"—other than that, there is risk of heightening mediocrity and poor-performance.

6.1.4 Coordination

The impediments of coordination remain critical in view of the adoption of a multifaceted governance architecture. In its quest to fast track integration, the AU adopts and works with eight

RECs with their associated structural and operational complexities. Whilst this model holds huge potential for accelerated integration, it risks diluting and obscuring clarity of accountability and delayed implementation due to intersecting membership and functional duplicity or redundancy (African Union, n.d). This development sets to motion, the clash between Nkrumah's choice for a monolithic continent-wide authority with present day institutional imperatives; a pragmatic adjustment is to clearly define tasks allocation, attach incentives, and specify responsibility thresholds in an attempt to drive sense of ownership and delivery milestones as opposed to assuming self-alignment (Kagame, 2024).

6.1.5 Digital Governance Risk

Digital governance, the key imperative of the Fourth Industrial Revolution assumes a double-edged sword character – a high-gear accelerator for continental integration and a top-flight risk for elite and institutional accountability. The AU Data Policy Framework and AfCFTA Digital Trade Protocol embody the expressway to integration and transactional cost reduction. Nonetheless, literature on digital discretion cautions that digital systems can consolidate power in software design and implementation as evidence from e-governance portals demonstrate that enhanced openness and increased visibility in themselves don't guarantee automatic enforcement of accountability, unless it is reinforced by institutional and political reforms (African Union, 2024). Implicitly, there should be a deliberate effort to partner digital integration with the following: (a) strict adherence to data governance, (b) explicit accountability for Algorithmic Decision Systems (ADS), and (c) clear routes for citizen feedback and contestations—without these imperatives, the crises of legitimacy could escalate.

6.1.6 Contemporary Relevance and Adaptation to 2020–2026 Realities

Real time-records point to the evolving nature of Pan African governance through *rules, finance, and data* as well as constitutional mindset. For instance, the coming into of force of AfCFTA's, implementation timetable, and subsequent ratification of new protocols demonstrate a route of integration solidly established on treaty instruments (African Union, 2019, 2021). Agenda 2063's Second Ten-Year Plan make provision for the authoritative Pan African planning frame for 2024–2033, which embeds responsibilities for implementation across the board, thereby implicitly advocating that a viable Nkrumah-rendition framework should be functional in a multi-level delivery system as opposed to it (African Union, 2024). Similarly, the AU's financing agreement places the 0.2% levy as a fundamental structure for sustainable funding and reporting deficiencies that impede optimal performance – emphasizing that fiscal decentralization continues to impede administrative efficiency (African Union, n.d). More so, ODI's 2025 analysis of carrying out the protocol on digital trade showcases anticipated consequences and obstacles, which thus underscores the fact that the success of modern day integration largely depends on the capacity of implementation, regulatory alignment, and pragmatic institutional framework (ODI Global, 2025).

Collectively, these dynamics and imperatives reinforce a strategic fit: Nkrumah's strategic logic remains valid and continues to apply, however, the most feasible route is "accountable sovereignty pooling"—sequentially deepening integration and collective decision making by first building integrity and reinforcing the credibility of Pan African and state institutions through audit follow-ups, sustainable financing, professional ethical standards in public service, and safeguards for digital governance (Kagame, 2024).

6.2 Implications for Policy and Practice

6.2.1 Implications for Policy

This study significantly contributes to conceptual integration - Accountable Pan-African Developmentalism (APAD) as an institutional theory of modern day Pan-African governance. In this light, APAD considers developmental-strategic unionism proposed by Nkrumah as a *functional architecture* with joint authority for defense and development and incorporating key insights of contemporary legitimacy and accountability highlighting contestation, integrity of performance, and regulatory control (Nkrumah, 1963).

The policy drive is intended to reframe "union" away from a terminal point (a constitutional federation) into a sequence of empirical capability thresholds: sovereignty pooling gains legitimacy when it is verifiably matched by tangible gains in the areas of integrity, efficiency, and effectiveness (audit sign off, financing reliability, accessibility of dispute settlement, digital service accountability). This reinforces theory which stresses that there are germane issues with institutional reform and organizational credibility within the context of AU, aligning with empirical observation that digital systems obfuscate discretion and accountability in public sector governance, which therefore requires remediation of structured design for accountability (Gelot & Soberdaum, 2024).

6.2.2 Implications for Practice

Practically, the study contributes a "Remodeled Template" for policy makers, AU/REC bureaucrats and technocrats, country specific governments, key public service sector actors, development partners, and national reform coalitions.

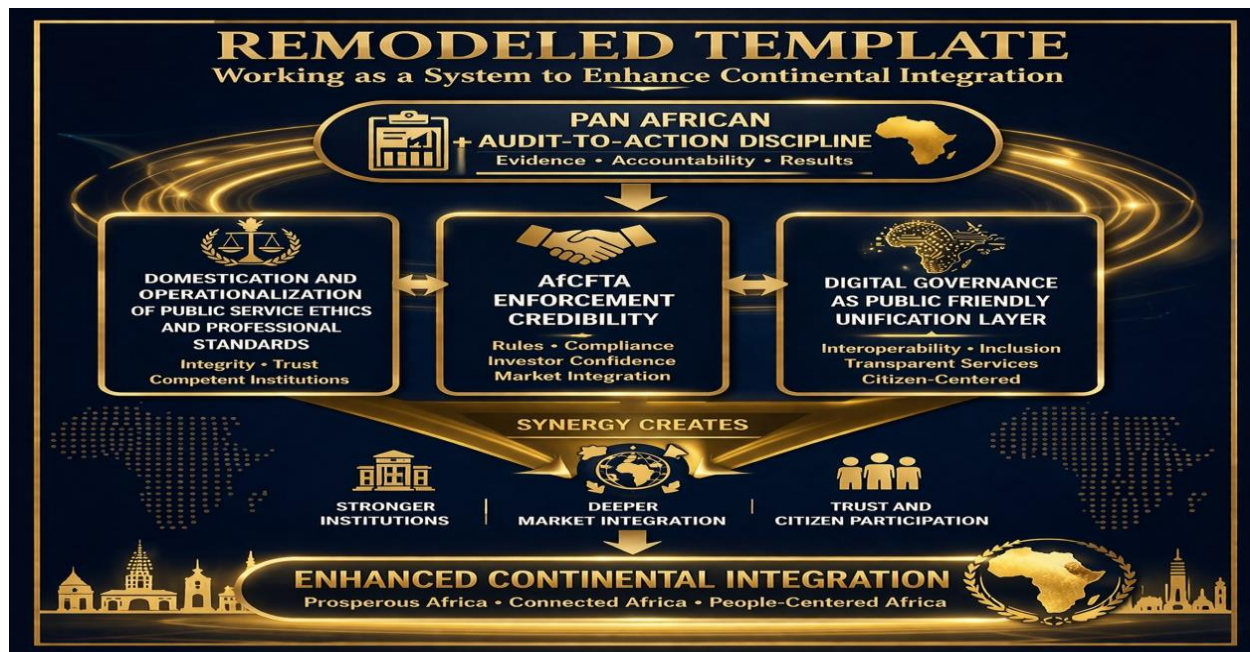


Figure 3: Remodeled Template for Enhanced Continental Integration

(Source: Authors Construct)

From Figure 3, the following are put forward as contribution to practice:

Create a Pan African “Audit-to-Action” Discipline

This can be implemented by evaluating ARTS-style monitoring of protocols tracking and disseminating final outcomes. Full implementation of this will straightly tackle the implementation deficit identified in AU reform reporting and also indicate an empirical accountability structure to enhance greater integration (African Union, 2020).

Financing Compliance as a Governance Reform

Financing compliance should be treated as a governance reform beyond the accounting imperative of it. It is important to note that both AU financing evidence and legal literature on the levy process and procedure suggest stable financing is a credibility pre-requisite, where progress facilitates programme implementation and also minimizes the risk of dependency (African Union, n.d).

Domestication and Operationalization of Public Service Ethics and Professional Standards

Domesticate ethical integrity and professional standards and operationalize by setting it into the public service charters and national civil service codes, clearly emphasizing recruitment systems built on merit, sense of nationalism and patriotism, effective disciplinary processes that know no party colours, creed or tribal affiliations etc. – these will help to tackle the impediments of ratification demonstrated in current scholarship (Mudau, 2022).

Build AfCFTA Enforcement Credibility

Build AfCFTA enforcement credibility by reducing barriers for dispute resolution such as digitalising procedures, aligning with extant legal literature, which contends that digitalisation holds the potency to minimize costs and enhance the adoption of official procedures (Kouamu, 2024).

Adoption of Digital Governance as a Public Friendly Unification Layer

Adopt digital governance as a public friendly unification layer, allowing seamless payments, identity, and exchange of data, but at the same time using it to promote rights and high standards of accountability. What the AU Data Policy Framework and digital trade protocol does is to provide policy direction only – with this skeletal arrangement, digital governance experts argue that scholarship cautions that accountability mechanisms should make room for functional autonomy (African Union Commission, 2024).

6.3 Conclusion

This study contends that Nkrumah's Pan-African governance framework is predominantly functional when read as a *functional institutional design* instead of a literal blueprint. His logic on reserved-powers, which implies consolidating decisive authority for defence, foreign policy, and development planning remains a strategic framework, particularly in times when functional sovereignty is increasingly shaped by bargaining power, data governance, security financing, and trade rules (Nkrumah, 1963).

Nonetheless, current evidence from AU reform documentation and Pan African governance audits propose that enhancing collective sovereignty can only be credible, if it is tied to empirical public sector accountability and performance capacity. Therefore, the paper proposes “*accountable sovereignty pooling*”: a sequenced pathway connecting integration milestones (AfCFTA digital trade harmonisation, data governance alignment, peace financing credibility) to the processes of disciplined accountability (audit follow-through, predictable financing compliance, public service professionalism, enforceable dispute settlement) (Kagame, 2024).

6.4 Recommendations for Future Studies

Given the scope of the study, it is thus recommended that future studies examine two or more empirical modules by: (i) conducting a comparative regionalization case studies across two or more RECs (e.g., ECOWAS, EAC, and COMESA) and (ii) performing process tracing of one Pan African policy instrument (e.g. ARTS, Peace Fund governance, or execution pilot of digital trade) to triangulate results.

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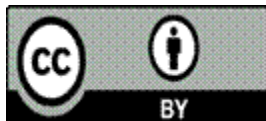
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